

# Muslim-Turkish Children in Germany

## Sociocultural Problems\*

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**T**he family is the primary institution in the socialization of all children. Meaningful work with foreign children without, or even against, their family is not possible (Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung, 1983:67). And, despite all else a gap exists between the family and the school (Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung, 1983:67). The question here is: can this gap be greatly reduced? If yes, how can it be reduced and what are the measures to be taken? If respect for other cultures and religions is maintained, Islam might be an important condition for the creation of a confluence between the parents of the Muslim-Turkish children and German educational institutions.

The circumstances of being torn between two cultures is most often a severe problem for Islamic families. Attempts made by these families to analyze and understand their situation are frequently inadequate. The issues are so complex that external help can only partially clarify certain aspects of them. Many relate to the private

*\*This article is based on research/interviews with fifteen Turkish families and Turkish schoolchildren in Germany in the federal state of Nord-Rhein Westfalen, especially in the industrial area of Duisburg, conducted by the author, in 1991-1992 and 1993-1994.*



sphere of life, and there simply is not much that officials can do to help.

Most of the Turkish children who were born in and who have grown up in Germany are confused. They are torn between the family on the one side and the German environment and school on the other. They are disoriented because they seem to belong nowhere, like the Turkish schoolchildren who were interviewed in Duisburg, Germany, in the district (Stadtteil) Bruckhausen.

Why is this the case? Nuray explains: "In Turkey we are the *Almanci* (those coming from Germany) and in Germany 'the damned foreigners.' I don't know where I belong." It's a hard life to be torn between two cultures. We have interviewed children who feel happy and at ease neither in German schools, in their family, nor in their homeland. And everyone expects those children to be successful in German schools.

With so many problems facing them, these children expect help, attention, and concern. A small girl, Fatma, from a primary school comes to me and takes hold onto my dress, feeling happy in doing this, as if nobody up to now has ever shown any care for her. One can very clearly feel in these children a longing for interest and affection, as if they were telling us: At last there is somebody to care for us. On some days we went there, we brought chocolates and other goodies. The smiles on their faces, mingled with the shame of not being shy, as their parents expect them to be, has made us think deeply about their situation.

Fatma Kurt, who has to take care of her eight siblings, says: "The parents take little care of their children. They are mainly interested in making money in order to return home sooner." This has an especially hard impact on girls. Sons are almost invariably the favorite ones in their families. For example, if the son becomes ill, he is immediately taken to a doctor. But, if this happens to the daughter, she is usually left to her own fate. This reflects conditions in Turkey, where thousands of children, especially girls, die because of this attitude and reasoning. It is usually said that if God wishes, the girl will get well without seeing the doctor anyway. This is not so important because many of the girls are just born accidentally, while a son is expected to be born.